

## *Mṛcchakaṭika* AS A DRAMA OF INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERS

Indian drama has its own theory and norms. These norms also concern the characters of the *dramatis personae*. Its persons are types; their behaviour is determined on the one hand by legend or history, on the other by the norms of the theory.

The plot of *Mṛcchakaṭika* — it is a *prakaraṇa* — is not determined by history, although reminiscences of any historic fact could have some part in it. The rules of religion and castes have traced the direction of the action for particular persons, but the author of *Mṛcchakaṭika* has individualized them so much, that their behaviour was not a result of their respective roles, but of their individual characters.

Every *dramatis persona* must certainly possess her individual marks as well as her typical traits. If the author of a drama does not give them in his text, the duty to express them falls on the director or even on the actor. In the *Mṛcchakaṭika* all the roles are individualized by the author.

The hero of the play is a merchant of Brahmin caste, but his view of the world is rather a Buddhistic one. As for a hero of the drama, he is a little too passive, if we compare him with the heroes of Greek tragedies, who had to fight with their destiny. However, Cārudatta is a real hero, because he could easily extricate himself out of his troubles, if he were not so honest. The integrity of his *cāritra* brings him chiefly into dangerous situation — and therefore such behaviour can be regarded as heroic. When his troubles disappear and his behaviour wins a high reward, he looks philosophically — like a Buddhist sage — at the vicissitudes of his life and magnanimously forgives all his foes. We have some doubts, if he does not go too far, when he allows Śakāra to retain his former position. It was no magnanimity but rather shortsightedness.

Cārudatta, a hereditary *sārthavāha*, has accomplished many benefices to his city and therefore he was reduced to poverty. He saw the misgovernment of the tyrant Palaka and blamed him, however, he did not join the conspirators. He loves Vasantasenā, but he remains faithful to his wife, he is also an attentive father. There are many controversies

here and even contradictory features in him, but we know, that this is a psychological fact of human nature.

Also the heroine of the drama, Vasantasenā abounds in contradictory traits. She is a courtesan by birth and this profession had a low status in India. But Vasantasenā is very rich, she does not practise her business, she is rather the owner of a big house for amusements. She behaves like a Hindu *kulastrī*, she is well bred, even performs the religious duties, she is talented, loves painting, music and poetry, she helps everyone who is in need, and is looked upon by everyone as an ornament of Ujjain. Even if we take in consideration the spirit of those times and different ethical principles, she differs greatly from the Indian type of courtesan. In her action she is shrewd and consistent — notwithstanding in the dangerous situation she doesn't use her abilities and dies like a martyr. Her sentiments for Cārudatta are pure, and these her qualities — not an accident — bring about at the end the fulfilment of her dreams.

Saṁsthānaka is a very individualized person and full of controversies. He is the black character of the play. He is a stupid, bloated fellow, he has no moral scruples to commit any crime, but he is also a coward. He heard something about the heroes of both eposes but commits comical mistakes — therefore he impresses the spectator like a jester. Later on, however, he turns out to be coldhearted murderer. Such a person is not conditioned by specific Indian milieu, he can appear in every milieu.

Maitreya is also no typical figure of Indian drama. It is true, he is — as *vidūṣaka* — an uneducated Brahmin, however, he possesses no traits of a clown. He is faithful to his friend Cārudatta, although this one can no more secure him — as formerly — a comfortable livelihood. He keeps company with him and tries to help him in every situation. He is not an atheist, but he doesn't take religious beliefs of Hinduism seriously, as he sees, that his very religious friend, without any own guilt fares so badly in his life. At the beginning of the play he is unwilling towards Vasantasenā — but that is easily to comprehend — he is a Brahmin, an ignoramus and she although a courtesan by birth, is a well-educated lady. But he has a sense of humour, this humour in which his friend Cārudatta is deficient. When he sees his friend in danger he would sacrifice even his own life to rescue him. Alas, he is not successful and he rather increases Cārudatta's troubles. Maitreya too is not determined by specific Indian milieu, such a person is understandable in every cultural milieu.

Sarvilaka, a Brahmin-burglar, is a kind of satire on the Brahmin caste. He uses cynically his holy cord as a help to break into the house of Cārudatta. However, he also possesses moral values, he doesn't steal from poor people, he doesn't assault women, — he is an honest thief, a real gentleman-burglar. Thanks to Vasantasenā who understands his situation, he obtains Madanikā without any ransom as his wife, but as

he hears that his friend is imprisoned, he leaves his wife and goes to rescue Āryaka. He succeeds in his conspiracy, removes the hated tyrant Palaka and afterwards he executes all the orders of the new ruler. This person too is rather cosmopolitan and not an Indian one.

Other persons are presented in pairs, to show their individual traits better. They perform the same functions but their behaviour is totally different.

Two passionate gamblers Saṁvāhaka and Darduraka have no success in gambling. Saṁvāhaka freed by Vasantasenā from his financial troubles, is disgusted with worldly life, he turns out a Buddhist monk and doesn't give up his new profession although his master Cārudatta — now governor of a province — could secure a better position for him. The other gambler Darduraka rescues his comrade from his persecutors and afterwards he joins a group of conspirators. He has nothing to lose — except his life — and in case of success he may make a good political career.

Both policemen also have different characters. Candanaka has a heart, sensitive to human troubles and helps the fugitive Āryaka, but afterwards he too must join the conspirators. The other police officer Viraka is very loyal to his authorities and in his service he wouldn't even pardon his own father.

Two *caṇḍālas* who execute Cārudatta, differ similarly in their behaviour. The one is soft-hearted and wants to save Cārudatta, for whom he has great respect, therefore he protracts the execution. The other one has no scruples, he only performs his duty and doesn't care about anything.

*Viṭa* of Vasantasenā has a poetic nature. *Viṭa* of Sakāra sells his services to him but he does it with abomination and in the end he must leave him.

Vardhamānaka, a servant of Cārudatta and Sthāvaraka, servant of Sakāra are both honest men and perform their duties well. Their situation, however, is not equal. Vardhamānaka has a good master, Sthāvaraka's master is a criminal. Sthāvaraka is a man of high ethics and piety. He would rather die than commit an immoral deed.

The above examples show that the author in the characterization of the dramatis personae goes beyond the rules of the theory and demonstrates the facts, taken from the real life, regardless of the rules. His characters are comprehensible even to a spectator who doesn't know the particulars of Indian customs. Therefore, this play won great popularity in Europe and was often staged in various adaptations. Goethe, for example, has noted its title in his diary. He read it in a German translation prepared by O. L. B. Wolff.

In Poland *Mṛcchakaṭika* was staged in Wrocław (1971) and in Cracow (1973). The European public likes exotic plays, but only ones, when the behaviour of persons is not too difficult to understand. *Mṛcchakaṭika* is just such a play. Often its author is called the Indian Shakespeare.